

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**AN INFORMATION OPERATIONS APPROACH  
TO COUNTER SUICIDE BOMBER RECRUITING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Information Operations (IO) is one of today's least understood, yet most common scapegoat for perceived Global War on Terrorism failures in Iraq. Despite the on-going efforts of strategists and commanders to leverage the media in an attempt to tell the "good news" successes in Iraq, news coverage continually gravitates towards act of violence, especially suicide bombings. With or without media support, recent polls indicate that the Coalition already won many of the "hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people. Yet, most of the success or failure of information operations is measured and stuck on telling only the "hearts and minds" story.

The analysis from this study suggests that IO correctly shoulders blame for all the wrong reasons. More appropriately, IO is underutilized in what can be deemed a "kinetic-only" battle on the suicide bomber. This project proposes an information operations policy expansion in relatively unused supporting elements – counterdeception and counterpropaganda. This will add a non-kinetic approach to the kinetic-centric fight on suicide bombers. The study will analyze how information operations, in the form of counterdeception and counterpropaganda, can target the recruiting base for suicide bombers. More specifically, the project explores the possible success that could be achieved when counterpropaganda and counterdeception address cognitive third order effects of those who are most influential to the potential suicide bomber's decision-making. This new approach targets the Sunni religious faction and the family. This departure from current information operations norms serves as a change to current strategy. The recommended strategy changes are also included in the study.



## AN INFORMATION OPERATIONS APPROACH TO COUNTER SUICIDE BOMBER RECRUITING

O ye who believe! The idolaters only are unclean. ...And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they?

Qur'an (147/9:28-30)<sup>1</sup>

Despite the United States' measured progress to rebuild Iraq and win the Global War on Terrorism, recent Gallup Polls indicate national support is waning. In fact, a daily Gallup Poll conducted on 11 November 2005 illustrated the declining public support when it reported the following: 77% of the American populace on 24 March 2003 felt the American role in the war in Iraq was the right thing to do, only 52% on 16 April 2004 felt the same way, and a mere 38% on 11 November 2005 felt the effort was not a mistake.<sup>2</sup> Often blamed is the conduct of Information Operations (IO). The inability to captivate the attention and support of the American public, as well as influence world opinion, appears directly proportional to the print and television media agenda. After all, news coverage rarely substitutes a success story for the sensationalism of a suicide bombing. Death tolls dominate the media while progress in Iraqi municipal infrastructure reconstruction, increased government stability, a growing number of Iraqi security forces, and even more telling – the overwhelming Iraqi support for coalition assistance – remain stories less told. This, compounded with the military being the only advertised element of national power, indicates that pundits who blame the government's inability to wage strategic communications may have gotten it partially correct. However, there is danger in being correct for the wrong reasons. To make this clear, it is important to discuss information operations: what they are doing well and what they are not doing well, before discussing what they can do – but are not.

### Information Operations: Right Scapegoat, Wrong Reason

Information Operations shoulder too much blame for the perceived failure to wage a successful Global War on Terrorism in Iraq. A closer examination of U.S. information operations illustrates why IO is one of today's least understood, most underutilized, and also most common scapegoats for perceived failure in Iraq. Field Manual 3-13 defines IO as:

the employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to affect or defend information and information systems, and influence decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

A common mistake often made by those who fault IO is the over-emphasis placed on the media and civil-military operations (CMO). Although vital, CMO and the media are not among the listed core capabilities in the above definition. They are merely related activities of IO. More specifically, FM 3-13 defines the supporting elements of IO as physical destruction, information assurance, physical security, counterintelligence, counterdeception, and counterpropaganda. IO's related activities are public affairs and CMO.<sup>4</sup> An enormous degree of energy is spent on these two non-core elements. Yet, despite the on-going efforts of strategists and commanders to leverage the media in an attempt to tell the "good news" successes in Iraq, news coverage continually gravitates towards the violence. A strong argument can easily be made that the Coalition won the harder to win "hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people through CMO and PAO coverage, but cannot convince the American people of the same successes. Even more perplexing is the high probability that this fight to wrestle media attention away from the suicide bomber is a losing battle that may continue, only to potentially exhaust the Coalition.

Surprisingly, the reaction of the Iraqi people during the liberation indicates the Coalition won their "hearts and minds" without the media, and the media coverage of suicide bomber aftermath appears to not impress the American public. A September 2005 Gallup Poll article entitled "Support for U.S. Policy in Iraq is Dwindling," attempted, but failed to explain why. The article suggested "the sudden and sharp decline in public support for the Bush administration's Iraq policy seen in the latest poll,"<sup>5</sup> was unrelated to the rise in suicide bombings:

The September 16-18 poll came on the heels of what was described as the deadliest day of attacks in Baghdad since the invasion of March 2003. Last Wednesday, a dozen or so suicide bombings and other attacks claimed the lives of more than 150 civilians and security personnel, only to be followed by more bombings and more than 30 killed on Thursday.<sup>6</sup>

The 12-15 September Gallup Poll results, which "spanned the period of Baghdad attacks, found no drop in the percentage of Americans saying it was worth going to war with Iraq."<sup>7</sup> Hence, although public affairs is a necessary non-core information operations element, the tiresome and losing media grind of "carrots for sticks" may have falsely deemed information operations a failure in Iraq. This indicates two phenomena. First, the media's ability to rapidly sway public opinion may be overrated. Second, the unbalanced efforts to leverage the media at the expense of other elements of information operations may be misplaced. Rather than exhaust information operations focused on convincing the media to tell "good new stories" and diverting attention away from suicide bombings, other IO options designed to have a more direct impact on defusing the suicide bombers' success should be explored.

Perhaps a more suitable reason for the information operations failure label is the lack of production from the IO supporting elements. In particular, counterdeception and counter-propaganda are underutilized in what can be deemed a "kinetic-only" battle on the suicide bomber. This research project proposes a policy expansion in information operations where counterpropaganda and counterdeception can add non-kinetic approaches to the kinetic-centric fight on suicide bombers by targeting the recruiting base. More specifically, this project explores the possible success that could be achieved when counter-propaganda and counterdeception address cognitive third order effects of those who are most influential to the potential suicide bomber's decision-making. The new approach targets the Sunni religious faction and the family, and this departure from current information operations norms requires changes to current national strategy.

#### National Strategy Shortfalls

The February 2003 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism is, at first glance, a very moving document that refines National Security Strategy global terrorism guidance. The nexus between both strategies and their global influence on other nation-states to follow suit is very clear. Nation-state and regional responses to the American-spearheaded United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1373 indicate that a common global effort to combat terrorism, in both word and, in some cases, deed, exists. The common thread woven into each strategy is a heavy reliance on law enforcement and the military element of national power to combat terrorism as a short term fix; whereas, diplomatic, intelligence, finance, and economic elements primarily target long-term counterterrorism objectives. Three other commonalities exist. The first is that information as an element of national power is barely mentioned. The second commonality found is that each document provides a very weak attempt to address terrorist recruiting. Finally, the third commonality is that there is no distinction made between the types of terrorism the U.S. faces. As a result, there is no tailored response for countering suicide bombers motivated by Islamic fanaticism. Not surprisingly, global successes and failures closely mirror the efforts outlined in printed strategy. The military and legal agencies report they are successfully winning a global battle of attrition with kinetic operations; tighter border and visa control measures render terrorist movement more difficult; intelligence is much more globally shared; finance freezing and procedures to counter money laundering are rendering significant set-backs to global terrorism movements.

Unfortunately, lack of progress is due to what is missing in each of the documents listed above. Today, suicide bombers motivated primarily by a distorted version of Islam are easily

recruited. They capture world media attention by leveraging media crews who are more focused on sensationalism than on reporting progress. Information operations are often blamed, but the lack of focused guidance in the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism should share the blame. The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism's long-term overarching focus needs a proactive, short-term complement that targets suicide bomber recruits. The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism (NMSP-WOT), dated 1 February 2006, is a vast improvement, but it still falls short. On the positive side, the new strategy does a better job defining the enemy and briefly mentions information operations, counterpropaganda, computer network operations (CNO) and recruitment. The new strategy does not separately address what it takes to counter suicide bombers, and similar to the NSCT, it is long-term focused. In an effort to propose recommendations for a more comprehensive written strategy, it is important to explore the motivation behind the most effective brand of terrorism faced today.

The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT) and the National Security Strategy (NSS) are clearly nested. In the NSS, Section III, entitled *Strengthen Alliances to Defeat Global Terrorism and Work to Prevent Attacks Against US and Our Friends*, provides the guidance, priorities and focus for the NSCT. Shortcomings in the NSCT stem from the guidance outlined in the NSS. The first shortcoming is the all-encompassing approach to terrorism: "The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism – premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents."<sup>8</sup> While it is admirable and not without merit to include all types of terrorism, the lack of guidelines specifically dedicated towards the nation's religiously motivated terrorist threats suggests that a "one size fits all" counterterrorism plan will work. This demonstrates a lack of understanding or unwillingness to address the specific motives for each brand of terrorist. The motivation for religious terrorism is distinctly different than secular based terrorism and therefore effective countermeasures for one will not necessarily be effective for the other.

Perhaps the most significant oversight of both the NSS and the NSCT is the omission of recruiting as a priority. The NSS states, "Our priority will be to disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations of global reach and attack their leadership; command, control and communications; material support; and finances. This will have a disabling effect upon the terrorists' ability to plan and operate."<sup>9</sup> The priorities did not mention terrorist recruitment; consequently, the NSCT followed suit. The NSCT barely mentions recruitment. There is one small entry in support of the objective "Locate terrorists and their organizations;" however, it funnels the sole responsibility to the Intelligence Community. "The Intelligence Community will continue its comprehensive effort to acquire new reporting sources, then use those sources to



penetrate designated terrorist organizations to provide information on leadership, plans , ...., and recruitment.”<sup>10</sup> The fact that the NSCT’s only substantial mention of countering recruitment is a passive intelligence collection process undermines the massive responsibility inherent with recruitment counterpropaganda. The Intelligence Community is not equipped to counter recruitment propaganda, and to suggest counterpropaganda is unnecessary indicates the strategy is reactive at best.

One of the more robust elements of strategy nested in the NSS and NSCT is the initiative to target money, freeze assets, and stop money laundering. Great detail and emphasis is placed on finance as an element of national power. The emphasis is laced throughout both documents. Not surprisingly, and unlike recruitment, great strides have been taken both nationally and globally to locate and stop terrorist financing. While this is certainly a very important counterterrorism tactic, the price of a suicide attack can be relatively inexpensive when the reward is an exaggerated view of “paradise in the afterlife.” The Sources of Islamic Revolutionary Conduct highlights the significant “promise of an immediate entry into paradise for the martyrs of jihad”<sup>11</sup> that guarantees “honor, adoration, and physical pleasures.”<sup>12</sup> Certainly, this costs nothing for the financier to resource; however, “families of jihadis often receive financial and material rewards such as better housing.”<sup>13</sup> These particular funds appeared to have escaped the strategists’ scrutiny. The NSCT is not averse to targeting individuals, stating, “The United States and its partners will target the individuals, state sponsors, and transnational networks that enable terrorism to flourish.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, the strategists who wrote the NSCT did not recognize the enormous contribution towards a recruiting counterpropaganda campaign had they advertised the forfeiture and recouping of funds paid to the families of martyrs. This certainly could make future suicide bombers, or at least their families, think twice. Aside from this missed opportunity, the strategy thoroughly attacks terrorist finances.

An analysis of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1373 provides a litmus test of how U.S. strategy influences the United Nations and the European Union. In fact, the same strategic strengths and missed opportunities in recruitment resonate in UNSCR 1373. This particular resolution is mentioned numerous times in the NSCT. Like the U.S. strategy, it is anti-financier-centric, and very light in demanding measures to counter recruitment. The resolution is similar to the “you’re either with us or with the terrorists” U.S. policy regarding nation-states that allow terrorist activities to function within their borders. The strong stance is evident in the words, “...every State has the duty to refrain from organizing, instigating, assisting or participating in terrorist acts in another State or acquiescing in organized activities within its territory ... .”<sup>15</sup> UNSCR 1373, however, dedicated only one sentence to recruitment.

Consequently, the responses from both the United States and European Union barely addressed recruitment. The lack of recruitment emphasis is found in the U.S. response to the probing questions asked by UNSCR 1373. Out of twenty-two pages, the response only dedicated three sentences to recruitment. Moreover, the U.S. countermeasures are strictly reactionary and after-the-fact. Recruiting for membership in a terrorist organization is merely grounds for deportation and loss of visa privileges.<sup>16</sup> The European Union response to UNSCR 1373 regarding recruitment is even weaker. It simply does not answer the resolution's question. On the other hand, the resolution resembles the NSCT's strong opposition towards terrorist financing. The EU response is thorough and even speaks of targeting individuals for money. However, the same missed opportunity found in the NSCT regarding not specifically targeting the funds delivered to families of martyrs is a missed opportunity in UNSCR 1373 and in the EU response, as well. Finally, a seven page, July 2003 special report to the United Nations on Anti-terrorism Assistance spoke volumes about drafting counterterrorism legislature, money laundering, and weapons trafficking, but never mentioned recruitment.<sup>17</sup> This exposes the narrow focus of the NSCT regarding global counterterrorism, and vividly reveals the urgency for the United States to get it right by publishing a supplemental strategy. Missed U.S strategic opportunities to counter recruitment are bound to be repeated elsewhere from nation-states following the U.S. lead.

The National Strategy on Combating Terrorism diffuses its intended direction because the countermeasures it proposes take a "one size of terrorism fits all" approach. Granted, the National Security Strategy must be written in general enough terms so that all options are covered; however, the NSCT needs the type of specificity that can direct the proper resources (means) towards sensible plans (ways) in order to achieve strategic goals (ends). As written, it fails to accomplish this. Moreover, by not making the distinction between secular and non-secular terrorists (let alone suicide bombers), the strategy's approach is too broad, and therefore underappreciates the motivational differences, as well as key differences in cultural, political, and technological factors. Clearly, it is no surprise that the United States is facing a terrorism predominately rooted in Islamic fanaticism:

The National Commission on Terrorism found that fanaticism rather than political interests is more often the motivation now, and that terrorists are more unrestrained than ever before in their methods. Other scholarly sources have reached similar conclusions. Terrorism is increasingly based on religious fanaticism.<sup>18</sup>

In light of this conclusion, the urgency for the NSCT and NMSP-WOT to address countermeasures tempered for the religious fanatic is readily apparent; however, not everyone

agrees. Pape, in Dying to Win, reaches a somewhat different conclusion. He agrees that defeating campaigns of suicide terrorism should be the focal point of any U.S. strategy, but he defines American presence in Muslim regions, not Islamic fundamentalism, as the root cause of suicide terrorism directed against Americans.<sup>19</sup> Pape suggests that spreading democracy and relying on regional democratic governments to reduce suicide terrorism will not work. His proposed blueprint for success resembles isolationism, where the U.S. is best served in a defensive posture with improved border control and visa standards; a complete withdrawal of American troops from the Gulf; long term energy independence with off-shore balancing to secure interests in the region; and limited military anti-al-Qaeda operations.<sup>20</sup> The problem with his conclusion is that it turns a blind-eye towards al-Qaeda's stated Caliphate objectives and assumes the United States has only to look within its own borders to satisfy vital interests. This suggestion underestimates the ideological goals of both radical and moderate Islamists; however, Pape does see a need to address suicide terrorists separately in any strategy.

Perhaps the most salient point that underscores the difference between secular terrorists and the type now facing the United States is motive. Matthew Morgan cites the following popular observations concerning the new brand of Islamic fanaticism facing the United States: "Earlier concerns about alienating people from supporting the cause are no longer important to many terrorist organizations. Rather than focusing on conventional goals of political or religious movements, today's terrorists seek destruction and chaos as ends in themselves."<sup>21</sup> He goes on to say, "For many violent and radical organizations, terror has evolved from being a means to an end, to becoming the end in itself."<sup>22</sup> The reason that this distinction is so important for the national strategy to address is that a terrorist who disassociates himself from the political goals will not be influenced by the current American propaganda outlined in the strategy. The current strategy takes a proactive stance in regard to freezing monetary assets and killing terrorists. However, information as an element of national power outlined in the strategy has no such proactive elements. The strategy focuses the information element of power on conveying American rhetoric. Stories of democratic processes, economic opportunities and enticing civil military projects are long-term talking points at best. Moreover, they will have no effect on a brand of terrorist who divorced himself from his own political goals, and substituted terror "from being a means to an end, to the end in itself."<sup>23</sup> This motivational difference between a secular and non-secular terrorist illustrates the IO disconnect in the National Strategy for Combating Terrorists. Information Operations is either misplaced or underutilized. Before proposing more appropriate IO measures for the militant Islamist, it would be prudent to further discuss why the current measures will not work.

Cultural differences are among the most vivid examples that underscore misdirected information operations as outlined in the national strategy. From the written strategy down to the commanders on the ground, winning an IO campaign replete with “good news stories” and wonderful free-democratic society rhetoric has been the focus. In addition, commanders often exhaust all measures to exploit media opportunities when terrorists indiscriminately kill innocent civilians. These approaches must be pursued, because they draw support from the intended IO targets – the local populations, the American public, and the international players. For cultural reasons, this type of strategy would potentially be very effective if leveraged against secular terrorists, who generally have pragmatic reservations<sup>24</sup> and “may view indiscriminate violence as immoral.”<sup>25</sup> Morgan also highlights that “the goals of secular terrorists are much more attuned to public opinion, so senseless violence would be counterproductive to their cause, and hence not palatable to them.”<sup>26</sup> This makes perfect sense as to why secular terrorists are more sensitive to the mainstream media. The current information operations initiatives either outlined or inferred from the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism would be well suited for secular terrorism; however, the same initiatives make little impact on today’s culturally different non-secular terrorist. Morgan ably draws the cultural distinctions that allow us to see the flaws of the current strategy’s information operations direction. He notes that religious terrorists do not hold the same pragmatic reservations that secular terrorists do.<sup>27</sup> He also highlights “indiscriminate violence may not be only morally justified, but constitute a righteous and necessary advancement of their religious cause.”<sup>28</sup> Coupled with differences in how secular and non-secular terrorist factions view their respective constituency base,<sup>29</sup> This clearly points out why a “one size fits all” information operations approach will not work. In fact, contrary to those who argue that the non-secular based terrorist uses the media skillfully and heavily, “religious terrorists are often their own constituency, having no external audience for their acts of destruction.”<sup>30</sup> With the exception of using the media as a recruitment tool and to instill fear, religious terrorists have little use for it and are not fazed by the American infatuation with winning the IO campaign. This all suggests that there must be better methods to devote information operations efforts against the type of terrorist facing the United States today.

In addition to the cultural dichotomy, secular and non-secular terrorists also view political and foreign policy appeasement very differently. Unfortunately, this is at the expense of a national strategy focused on a more secular-minded terrorist. One particular stated objective is to “Win the War of Ideas.” While this concept warrants long-term merit for thwarting terrorist support, particular portions are overly optimistic. For example, “We will continue assuring Muslims that American values are not at odds with Islam”<sup>31</sup> and “The United States will work

with such moderate and modern governments to reverse the spread of extremist ideology and those who seek to impose totalitarian ideologies on our Muslim allies and friends,”<sup>32</sup> fall prey to the assumption that non-secular terrorists are moved by foreign policy adjustments and new ideologies. Bruce Hoffman, in Inside Terrorism, finds, “For the religious terrorist, violence is a divine duty...executed in direct response to some theological demand...and justified by scripture.”<sup>33</sup> Morgan drew the conclusion shared by many that, “This reasoning makes political change or conventional political objectives irrelevant, and is consistent with observations that violence is itself the objective.”<sup>34</sup> In light of Osama bin Laden’s fatwa, “to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it,”<sup>35</sup> it becomes readily apparent that the same diplomatic attempts to alter foreign policy or apply political appeasement which might work with a secular terrorist with political goals will have no effect on Islamic radicals. Pape is somewhat, but not entirely at odds with this assertion. He argues that suicide bombings are on the rise, because “terrorist groups learn from one another”<sup>36</sup> and history ably points to a fifty percent success rate of altering the political landscape or forcing negotiations.<sup>37</sup> In particular, he cites terrorists achieving partial to full expectations of political or territorial goals, such as:

Hezbollah versus United States and France in 1982, ...Hezbollah versus Israel, 1983-85; Hamas versus Israel, 1994, and Hamas versus Israel, 1994-95; in one case, the targeted government entered into sovereignty negotiations with the terrorists (LTTE versus Sri Lanka, 1993-94 and 2001); in one case, the terrorist organization’s top leader was released from prison (Hamas versus Israel, 1997).<sup>38</sup>

Pape, however, highlights limits to his findings. He theorized the suicide terrorist success rate to achieve political goals will be greatly reduced when their goals “compel target democracies to abandon goals central to national wealth or security.”<sup>39</sup> There is an enormous difference between convincing the United States to withdraw Marines from Lebanon where no vital interests were at stake, compared to the interests at stake combating suicide bombers in the Global War on Terrorism. Placed in this context, Pape comes full circle with Morgan’s conclusions that radical Islamists may continue to attack without the hope of achieving political goals. This underscores the importance for any U.S. strategy to recognize the distinction. In fact, Steven Simon and David Benjamin noted:

... that many al Qaeda attacks, including the major planning phase of the 9/11 attacks, took place during favorable times for the Palestinians in the Middle East peace process, and that no foreign policy changes by the U.S. government could possibly have appeased the bin Ladenist radical.<sup>40</sup>

### Suicide Bombers are Rational Beings: Rationality is a Prerequisite for IO Targeting

The foundation of any strategy that leverages information operations must assume the targeted decision maker is accessible. When applied to the suicide bomber, this means the suicide bomber must be a rational thinker. Any chance for counterpropaganda and counterdeception to achieve third order cognitive effects relies on this assumption. Likewise, attempts to dissuade the support of those most influential to the potential suicide bomber hinges on those who support being rational, therefore accessible, targets. Without this assumption, policy writers, strategy makers, and commanders at operational and tactical levels are confined to traditional, kinetic-based, counter-suicide bomber operations. These approaches are problematic at best because of their reactive (versus proactive) nature. A proactive approach using information operations would require “getting into the head of the suicide bomber” before he chooses to commit; however, in order for the cognitive side of a target to be accessible, the target must first be rational. There are many who believe the suicide bomber is irrational. In response to:

the rising rate of suicide terrorism (even while the overall number of terrorist incidents were on the decline), U.S. Senator John Warner echoed the sentiments of many who observed this trend when he said: “Those who would commit suicide in their assaults on the free world are not rational and are not deterred by rational concepts.”<sup>41</sup>

While the opinions of Senator Warner and those who agree with him are not necessarily those of scholarly authority, their opinions are certainly understandable. After all, psychopaths are clinically diagnosed irrational beings, and terrorist behavior has often been associated with psychopathological behavior. Pearce, in *Police Negotiations*, labeled the terrorist as “an aggressive psychopath, who has espoused some particular cause because extremist causes can provide an external focal point for all the things that have gone wrong in his life.”<sup>42</sup> The argument for irrationality is even more compelling when the motives and behavior of Islamic suicide bombers, often justified by Koranic verses, are analyzed under the microscope of those motivated by Western democratic ideology, which is deeply rooted in traditional Christian-Judeo beliefs. Those who cling to the concept that the suicide bomber is irrational shackle the potential of information operations to affect the recruiting base. This is readily apparent in the National Security Strategy and National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, both of which emphasize the kinetic side, but lack a strong stance when addressing the use of information to deter suicide bomber recruitment.

Randy Borum, in his book Psychology of Terrorism, cites many studies that conclude that terrorists, and more importantly, suicide bombers are in fact very rational. On the topic of psychological and personality abnormality, Borum quotes several authorities:

Despite more than two decades of research and theoretical speculation attempting to identify what makes terrorists 'different,' perhaps the best documented generalization is negative: terrorists do not show any striking psychopathology (McCauley, 1989). In fact, Crenshaw (1981) argues that "the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality" (p. 390), and Silke (1998) has concluded that "most serious researchers in their field at least nominally agree with the position that terrorists are essentially normal individuals."<sup>43</sup>

Borum points to Friedland's 1992 opinion to counter older studies. Friedland opines, "as for empirical support, to date there is no compelling evidence that terrorists are abnormal, insane, or match a unique personality type. In fact, there are some indications to the contrary."<sup>44</sup> In a 2002 scientific review, Charles Ruby concludes, "terrorists are not dysfunctional or pathological; rather, it suggests that terrorism is basically another form of politically motivated violence that is perpetuated by rational, lucid people who have valid motives."<sup>45</sup> With the exception of the concept "another form of politically motivated violence,"<sup>46</sup> Ruby's claim closely matches most contemporary findings. Finally, after Borum admitted that there are some characteristics that psychopaths and terrorists share, he proposed Cooper's 1978 findings that highlight the core deficits that they do not share. In *Psychopath as a Terrorist*, Cooper draws a noticeable distinction between terrorist and psychopath behavior. He states, "Terrorism, like any other serious undertaking, requires dedication, perseverance, and a certain selflessness. These are the many qualities that are lacking in the psychopath."<sup>47</sup> The selflessness characteristic in a rational being will be discussed later as an exploitable trait that can be targeted with counterpropaganda.

The suicide bomber is a special breed of terrorist that may warrant a separate psychological study. There are two reasons for this. First of all, the suicide attack moved to the forefront as the method of choice. Prior to the sensationalized aftermath of recent Al-Qaeda sponsored suicide bombings, and as early as the 1980s, suicide attacks accounted for more deaths than any other method. As evidence, a 2001 State Department report, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, concluded, "Even excluding the 9/11 attacks on America, in the span of two decades between 1980 and 2001, suicide attacks accounted for only 3% of all terrorist incidents, but they were responsible for 48% of the terrorism-related deaths."<sup>48</sup> Borum posited a few suggestions for the increased use of suicide bombings. He specifically highlighted the logistical and tactical advantages by emphasizing the low cost and unlikelihood of being captured or compromising

the group's security.<sup>49</sup> Even more straightforward is Pape's 2003 conclusion that, "the main reason that suicide terrorism is growing is that terrorists have learned that it works."<sup>50</sup> Certainly, the effective and increased use of suicide bombers warrant a separate psychological study. This justification is even more convincing when examined under the possibility that IO could be an effective counter if it only took concluding that the suicide bomber is a rational being.

The second reason warranting a separate psychological study is that suicide bombers represent a brand of terrorism that is even more difficult to label as rational for policy makers rooted in western democratic Christian-Judeo upbringings. Policy makers and strategy writers must bridge this gap and focus a more proactive information-based strategy on the recruiting hot-beds of rational suicide bombers. Once again, Borum's argument that suicide bombers are rational is both contemporary and convincing. He successfully conveys the rationality argument by distinguishing the differences in mental processes between one who commits suicide and one who uses it as a form of violence to inflict massive casualties for a cause. Borum contends:

Existing research reveals a marked absence of major psychopathology among "would-be" suicide attackers; that the motivation and dynamics for choosing to engage in a suicide attack differ from those in the clinical phenomenon of suicide; and that there is a rational strategic logic to the use of suicide attack campaigns in asymmetric conflict.<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Silke in a 2003 report adds that the "personalities of suicide bombers are usually quite stable and unremarkable (at least within their own cultural context)."<sup>52</sup> However, Borum's more compelling points focus on the differences between the suicide bomber and the person clinically diagnosed for suicidal tendencies. He does this by capitalizing on the findings of the Israeli psychology professor, Ariel Merari. Borum claims Merari "is one of the few people in the world to have collected systematic, empirical data on a significant sample of suicide bombers."<sup>53</sup> Merari fully expected to find "suicidal dynamics" and "mental pathology" in his study of Middle East suicide bombers.<sup>54</sup> To his surprise, he "found none of the risk factors normally associated with suicide, such as mood disorders or schizophrenia, substance abuse or history of attempted suicide."<sup>55</sup> Borum highlighted the differences in motive between a jihadist seeking martyrdom and a clinically diagnosed person with suicidal tendencies, and attributed motive as the reason for the difference in phenomenon. The differences are remarkable. On one hand, suicide in the traditional sense is:

associated with hopelessness and depression. The desire to end intense and unbearable psychological pain typically motivates the actor to commit such an act. Others who care for the actor typically view suicide as an undesirable outcome. Family and loved ones attempt to discourage the behavior and often struggle with feelings of shame if suicide does occur.<sup>56</sup>



The jihadist, on the other hand, “views their act as one of martyrdom” where “the primary aim of suicide terrorists is not suicide.”<sup>57</sup> Salib claims, “They see themselves having a higher purpose and are convinced of an eternal reward through their action.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, Borum focused on the stark differences between how those close to the jihadist view suicide attacks and how those close to someone clinically diagnosed as suicidal view suicide. He states:

people typically associate martyrdom with hopelessness about afterlife rewards in paradise and feelings of heroic sacrifice. The desire to further the cause of Islam and to answer the highest calling in that religion motivates the actor. Others who care for the actor see the pending act as heroic. Family and loved ones typically support the behavior, and, if the event occurs, the family is honored. Not only does the family of a martyr gain forgiveness of their sins in the afterlife, but the supporting community often cares for them socially and financially.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, Borum’s research suggests suicide bombers (and their supporters) are rational, and in addition, sheds light on possible vulnerabilities – the family and the selflessness of the suicide bomber – that information operations (if policy allows) can target with counterpropaganda.

#### Counterpropaganda: A New Approach

The first major recommendation this paper broaches is for the NSCT to entertain the deliberate targeting of the suicide bomber’s family. Counterpropaganda at the expense of the family that the potential suicide bomber leaves behind may serve to influence the bomber’s decision before he makes it. Specifically, any exalted family status or references to martyrdom should cease. Any money or property traditionally given to the families of suicide bombers (after the act) should be sought after and frozen. This is not a radical departure from the current strategy, since it already targets individuals and freezes terrorist funds. The counterpropaganda initiative should advertise the intention that families of suicide bombers will be investigated for charges of abetting and incarcerated if found guilty. In addition, seeking “blood money” is an accepted Muslim tradition when death is involved. Tribal sheiks do not use it as a traditional form of compensation for the death of innocent bystanders during suicide bombings; however, pushing the issue in the Muslim communities puts a “Muslim face” on the counterpropaganda approach. It also serves as an additional complication for the families of suicide bombers. Holding tribal sheiks accountable for the families of suicide bombers, even when the bombers act without tribal leader knowledge, is another way of collecting “blood money” and leverages practiced regional culture.

Successful counterpropaganda in this form relies on a premise previously discussed in the section regarding psychology of terrorism. Borum suggested that selflessness is a trait

commonly found in suicide bombers, yet is uncharacteristic of those clinically diagnosed as suicidal.<sup>60</sup> This phenomenon serves as the cornerstone intended to make the potential suicide bomber recruit reconsider. The counterpropaganda initiative targets the selflessness trait inherent in suicide bombers. The burden and pain deliberately leveraged on the bomber's family is intended to prey on the conscience of a selfless suicide bomber recruit. Paramount to the success of this counterpropaganda approach is the media coverage intended to advertise and exploit. Media coverage of the first time this is exploited serves as an example for future families of potential suicide bombers to contemplate.

Computer Network Operations (CNO) is another element of information operations that could supplement the counterpropaganda efforts designed to target the families of potential suicide bombers. Jarret Brachman, in a recent *ROA National Security Report*, highlighted the rise of jihadi-based internet sites that have been used as recruiting tools. He also revealed, "Several pockets of expertise have emerged within the public and private sectors that understand how and where jihadi Web propagandists post their material... which is meant to gain support from sympathizer audiences while demoralizing Americans and their allies."<sup>61</sup> Knowing this, it is not beyond reason to suggest that aggressive CNO efforts linking advertising experts with science and technology agencies could outmaneuver jihadi web-site recruiting efforts. Viruses, pop-ups, attaching unwanted files with counterpropaganda, and manipulating jihadi files are but a few examples of how CNO could possibly disrupt jihadi websites while targeting potential suicide bomber recruits and their families.

#### Counterdeception – A New Approach

The second major recommendation of this paper is to recognize the possibilities of counterdeception. A counterdeception plan that utilizes Sunni imams as delivery platforms strikes at the motivational cornerstone of all Islamic-based suicide bombers. Recruitment propaganda hinges on distorted interpretations of Koranic verses that justify killing infidels and achieving instant heavenly rewards if one dies in an act of Jihad. While these Koranic verses do exist, most Muslims disagree with over their meaning. In fact, there are alternative Koranic verses for every militant one addressing similar topics. In light of the previous discussion on the psychology and motivation of the suicide bomber, implanting after-life doubt with verses of the Koran delivered by Sunni imams is bound to give potential suicide bombers pause. In fact, since suicide bombers are considered rational thinkers, a sequenced dosage of the appropriate Koranic teachings delivered by imams should help unhinge the deception used by recruiters. After all, who is willing to rush to eternal damnation if there is any doubt? On the surface,

leveraging Sunni Imams as a counterpropaganda delivery means may appear too sensitive for U.S. strategy; however, a raging debate among mainstream Muslims indicates they are poised to place a “Muslim face” on the repair to damages inflicted by terrorism. Ziauddin Sardar, a leading Muslim writer for *Guardian Unlimited*, may have said it best, “We have given free reign to fascism within our midst, and failed to denounce fanatics who distort the most sacred concepts of our faith. We have been silent as they proclaim themselves martyrs, mangling beyond recognition the most sacred meaning of what it is to be a Muslim.”<sup>62</sup> He also states that “the silent Muslim majority must now become vocal,”<sup>63</sup> and pleas for Muslims everywhere to “reclaim a balanced view of Islamic terms ....”<sup>64</sup> This new rhetoric represents a growing consensus among the Muslim community, and indicates that the United States may be ready to embrace this very paradigm-breaking approach.

Certainly, applying the lessons learned from James Bill and Robert Springborg’s Politics in the Middle East treatment of Egyptian twentieth century solutions when Populist Islam (al-Islam al-sha’bi) challenged Established Islam (al-Islam al-rasmi) are worth exploring. In their book, Bill and Springborg classify “established religion” as one that “adheres closely to the ideal described in texts and interpreted by religious scholars. In many cases, it is a state religion and as such is formally bound up in the legitimacy of government.”<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, Populist Religion speaks to those less accessible to the clerics of an established religion.<sup>66</sup> The threat, as Bill and Springborg suggest, occurs when populist movements undermine the governmental support that “established Islam” advocates. Richard Bulliet claims the threat is a centuries-old manifestation stemming from a lack of authoritative hierarchy and centralized institutions.<sup>67</sup> Prompted by European pressure, Egypt sought to suppress the “excesses of popular religion” that Sufi movements posed.<sup>68</sup> Some of the Egyptian approaches that were designed to quell Sufi movements are certainly not beyond consideration in today’s crisis within Islam. They are:

... preaching Friday sermons that underscore obedience to authority, ...issuing fatwas supportive of governmental policies; outlawing various manifestations; subordinating outlying factions (in Egypt’s case the Sufi movement) by appointing them roles as civil servants responsible to the government; and monitor the activities of preachers and occasionally restrict their movements, imprison them, or close the mosques in which they preach.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, Bill and Springborg pointed out Egypt’s efforts in the 1970s to lull followers away from populist imams that received private endowments to preach from the growing numbers of smaller mosques. The governmental efforts to centralize and fund imam training, place imams on a public payroll, as well as build, clean and repair mosques served to control and attract worshippers from those who preached from a populist pulpit.<sup>70</sup> These same practices that

achieved moderately successful results for Egypt to abolish the perceived threat of Sufism are worthy of consideration in today's crisis in Islam where some populist movements broach Jihad and suicide bombing.

Richard Bulliet draws similar conclusions, but proposes additional measures that counterdeception efforts could exploit. Recognizing the impact that the modern state, the modern media, and the modern citizen made to weaken state-sponsored Islamic authorities, Bulliet argues modern solutions must address the modern challenges.<sup>71</sup> In addition to his hard-line stance towards enforcing state-sponsored rules, Bulliet proposes a long-term solution that leverages education. He suggests that moderate Islamists can be marginalized by "providing educational and research institutions that exist independently from both traditional seminaries and formal government educational systems."<sup>72</sup> By providing "venues for modern Muslim intellectuals to develop new ideas about contemporary issues,"<sup>73</sup> state-sponsored education and research can better satisfy the "many Muslims whose spiritual, moral, and intellectual needs have not been met by the faith's traditional institutions."<sup>74</sup> In theory, this would reduce the population base of those willing to resort to radical Caliphate solutions, which in turn, decreases the suicide bomber recruitment base. Placed in the context of today's Global War on Terrorism, state-sponsored religious efforts could empower and leverage Sunni imams in a way that counterpropaganda can exploit.

New concessions are necessary if Sunni imams are used to wage a suicide bomber counterdeception campaign. Religious engagement at the highest level is paramount. Understanding and engaging the Mufti hierarchy, without being intrusive, offers a "top-down" opportunity to influence the Sunni faction. Although Bulliet argues there is no well-defined hierarchy, some evidence exists that he may only be partially correct. During our Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) I and II deployment, my battalion, Task Force 2-3 Field Artillery, identified a Sunni hierarchy that distributed common themes on a weekly basis. By engaging one of the most influential Sunni imams in Iraq (the Sheik of the Al-Nida Mosque in Baghdad) on a regular basis and through weekly Friday mosque monitoring, I learned that the head Mufti (religious leader) from the Gaylani Shrine located in the Rusafa District of Baghdad was viewed as the top religious authority among Sunnis. The Mufti used the Al-Nida Mosque's (Adhamiya District of Baghdad) imam to distribute Fatwahs and common messages to the larger mosques throughout Iraq. By Tuesday each week, mosques throughout Iraq possessed the Mufti's message and were under instruction to include it in Friday's holy day gathering.<sup>75</sup> Because I often engaged the imam from the Al-Nida Mosque, he offered to provide the Task Force advance warning on the Tuesday prior if any of the messages meant for Friday were contentious. To be certain, the

power of religious engagement and learning the Mufti hierarchy is worth exploring. The potential when leveraging Sunni imams to deliver counterdeception messages that address a population influenced by deceptive Koranic verses used by suicide bombing recruiters is huge, but remains untapped.

Holding Sunni imams accountable, while also diverting credit to them, is a huge task. This requires both overt and, at times, covert “mosque monitoring”<sup>76</sup> during Friday’s Call to Prayer and services. The short-term benefit of mosque monitoring is that it allows military units or government authorities to quickly persuade or replace imams who preach violent messages. The long-term benefit of mosque monitoring is that it lends itself to pattern analysis where geographical regions prone to fomenting violence can be identified early. In short, its use can be instrumental when taking a proactive stance towards potential suicide bomber recruiting hot-beds. In the First Armored Division, we found that the imams of smaller mosques, less prone to state-sponsorship, were more likely to advocate violence and terrorist behavior. Once identified, a variety of techniques were used to defuse the influence that a violent pulpit had on potential suicide bombers. Religious engagement was always the first attempt. If this did not work, I was often asked by the Division’s leadership to leverage the influential imam from the Al-Nida Mosque. If he could not convince a wayward imam from preaching violent messages, the First Armored Division would either arrest the imam or seek his replacement through the Minister of Religion. Some of the more elusive cases occurred when a violent mosque message was delivered by an imam who was only visiting. Holding imams responsible for guest preachers could be enforced by the Minister of Religion. Many Muslim countries have a Ministry of Religious Affairs. This influential position can, and should, be used to replace wayward imams that either choose not to support the counterdeception plan or flagrantly preach militant Koranic verses. Mosque monitoring is easier to accomplish when military units are in theater, but poses a unique challenge for potential recruiting hot-beds (Saudi Arabia and Pakistan) devoid of U.S. troops. In light of the possible benefit of using Sunni imams in counterdeception, a strategic need for counterdeception as an element of information operations when the military cannot be present exists.

#### Recommended Changes for the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism and National Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism (NMSP-WOT)

In order to capitalize on the findings and proposals identified in this paper, the Department of Defense needs to include supplemental policy guidance for the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. The NMSP-WOT, is a vast improvement, but it still lacks a short-term focus that separately addresses what it takes to counter suicide bombers. To recap the reasons

for changes to both strategies, the current strategies propose measures more suitable for countering secular-based terrorism. The strategy is an improvement, but its guidance still falls short. Also, while important, the long-term counterterrorism focus (promote democracy and regional stability, globally assist states that need it, and win the war of ideas) needs a short-term catalyst oriented toward the nation's most prevalent and dangerous threat – the suicide bomber motivated by Islamic fanaticism. In addition, the policy guidance's new wording should “pull no punches” and target an enemy vulnerability that the current strategies barely address – recruitment. In order to pursue this, policy guidance must be willing to leverage and monitor Sunni imams in an unprecedented counterdeception plan. Secondly, policy guidance must entertain a counterpropaganda plan that targets families of potential suicide bombers. These two underutilized elements of information operations (counterdeception and counterpropaganda) can help achieve the desired third order effects of dissuading potential suicide bombers, but they must first hurdle the paradigm shift embedded in a strategy that avoids addressing religion and family. Certainly a strategy that “relies on ingenuity and innovation”<sup>77</sup> as well as “targeting individuals”<sup>78</sup> is ready for change.

#### Streamlining Doctrine and Strategy

The elements of information operations identified in this paper as possible solutions for countering suicide bomber recruitment cannot be executed, nor meet strategic guidance, without changing Joint Publication 3-13. Counterdeception and counterpropaganda are elements of information operations outlined in the Army's Field Manual 3-13; however the Joint community did not include the two elements in the JP 3-13 when it solicited input from each of the services for the writing of JP 3-13. As identified in this paper, counterdeception and counterpropaganda are viable concepts that may at times be beyond the ability of the Army to execute. As a result, there will be times where strategy dictates an effect that cannot be achieved because there is no joint overlap capability. This is the case with counterpropaganda and counterdeception. An additional doctrine and strategy disconnect exists for CNO. The JP 3-13 assigned USSTRATCOM as the agency responsible for CNO. The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism; however, excluded STRATCOM from its list of combatant commands that receive strategic guidance for the Global War on Terrorism. This oversight (or deliberate exclusion) undermines the potential that this paper suggests CNO could contribute to the counterpropaganda efforts. Fixing the doctrine, streamlining the strategy, determining which agencies are best suited for each task, and subsequently assigning responsibility and

resourcing the respective agencies, will permit information operations to better counter the current suicide bomber recruitment threat.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism and the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism shoulder unique challenges posed by a brand of religious extremism. The strategies bundle the national elements of power in a fashion more suitable for long term ways and ends. The effects of globalization, the motivation driving religious extremists, the cultural factors, and the ability of religious extremists to divorce themselves from political objectives underscore a need to supplement the current strategy with a stance more likely to affect the decision of the terrorist during the recruitment stage. The policy should make a concerted effort to target the most lethal terrorist to date – the suicide bomber. Additionally, an inclusive effort should be made to place the Army's elements of information operations into the Joint Publication 3-13. Finally, the strategies would be well-served to focus untapped resources – the counterpropaganda and counterdeception elements of information operations – on two of the most vulnerable yet influential groups: the families of potential suicide bombers, and the imams.

### Endnotes

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<sup>4</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Information Operations Command, *Information Operations, Capabilities, Applications and Planning Course, Student Guide* (Ft Belvoir, VA: 1<sup>st</sup> IO Command, October 2004), 14.

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<sup>8</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, February 2003), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen P. Lambert, *The Sources of Islamic Revolutionary Conduct* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Military Intelligence College, 2005), 63.

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations Security Council Counterterrorism Committee, "U.S. Report to the Counterterrorism Committee Pursuant to Paragraph 6 of Security Council Resolution 1373 of September 2001 Implementation of UNSCR 1373," available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/unsc.html>; Internet; accessed 10 November 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Special Report to the UNCTC on OSCE Anti-terrorism Assistance*, 6 March Special Meeting, 24 July 2003, 1-7.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew J. Morgan, "The Origins of New Terrorism" in *National Security Policy and Strategy, Volume III*, (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 27 October 2005), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win* (New York: Random House, 2005), 237.

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<sup>21</sup> Morgan, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Brian Jenkins, *The Likelihood of Nuclear Terrorism*, P-7119 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, July 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Morgan, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, 24.
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- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics In The Middle East* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994), 58-59.
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- <sup>67</sup> Richard Bulliet, "The Crisis Within Islam," *Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 2002): 11
- <sup>68</sup> Bill and Springborg, 59.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid, 59-61.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid, 61.
- <sup>71</sup> Bulliet, 18.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Task Force 2-3 FA's identification of the Gaylani Shrine and Al-Nida Mosque connection occurred when mosque monitoring across the First Armored Division's assigned zones in Baghdad on a particular Friday identified a common message that was suspiciously coincidental. On that particular Friday, Sunni imams throughout Baghdad preached against the Coalition placing women in prison. The Al-Nida Mosque, located in the Adhamiya District of Baghdad, is one of the most prominent Sunni Mosques in Iraq. The Imam of this particular mosque preaches to six thousand Sunnis on Friday, and was prominent enough that he became someone I engaged often. As a result, he confirmed the Mufti hierarchy and even offered to tell me the Fatwahs and common themes on the Tuesday before he delivered them to the other mosques for the upcoming Friday's prayer.

<sup>76</sup> Mosque monitoring was first used and developed by Task Force (Gunner) 2-3 FA in the First Armored Division during OIF1. The Division approved the concept and emplaced it across all Baghdad districts. Units had the luxury of developing their own techniques, however, a weekly standardized report and database were consolidated at the division in order to identify patterns of fomenting violence.

<sup>77</sup> Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, 29.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 15.

